

Le Chevalier de Saint-Georges (1745-1799)
First known as **Joseph de Bologne**

Name _____



Original painting of Saint-Georges by Mather Brown (1787)

His family moved to France when he was 10 years old and Joseph was enrolled in a boarding school. In the mornings, he studied literature, science, music, language, and dance. He excelled playing the violin. His afternoons were spent in the weapons room. By the age of 15, Joseph was developing a reputation in fencing. Through much of his life, he would find that the best fencers in the world wanted to fence with him.



When Joseph left boarding school, he entered life as a nobleman. He had an excellent education and refined manners. He was accepted in many circles at a time when there was serious racial unrest. It was King Louis XV who gave Joseph the title of Chevalier de Saint-Georges, after this father's title, because of his extraordinary fencing abilities.



In 1766, Saint-Georges began studying composition. Early in his career he published six string quartets. He went on to compose seven violin concertos, more string quartets, small symphonies, vocal music, a ballet, and six operas.

Throughout his career, Saint-Georges was a part of various privately funded and highly regarded orchestras. He made his solo debut performing one of his own violin concertos. His music was very expressive but also required virtuoso skill! He was also a busy conductor, and well respected by the musicians. Sometimes Saint-Georges played first violin in the orchestra.

His reputation as a conductor continued to grow. It didn't take long before Saint-Georges was appointed director of the prestigious Paris Opéra. The offer was withdrawn, however, when some singers, dancers, and actresses refused to take direction from him because of the color of his skin. He moved on. By the 1780s, Saint-Georges was the main conductor of one of the best orchestras in France, maybe the best in all of Europe. This orchestra commissioned Franz Joseph Haydn to write six symphonies, numbers 82-87. These were nicknamed "Paris" symphonies.



A scene from a performance at the Paris Opéra

Saint-Georges was a very busy and popular person! He took a few students, including Queen Marie Antoinette, and had developed a large following. He had many friends and attended lots of parties. Aristocrats all across Europe knew of him. He was very generous with his own money. For as much as he was included as a peer in circles of the wealthy, however, he was also often reminded of his mixed heritage. He seemed to have been the only black man of the time who lived the life of a nobleman.



Everything changed for Le Chevalier de Saint-Georges in 1789 with the start of the French Revolution. He was a nobleman (and friends with King Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette) but sympathetic to the Revolution. The peasants were fighting to change inequities such as high taxes and restrictions on both land ownership and hunting. Saint-Georges gave up his wealth, music, and comfortable life to join their cause. He commanded a group of men from the West Indies who had come to France to offer their services.

At one point during the Revolution, Saint-Georges was wrongly accused of misusing money meant for his troops and sent to prison. His high military rank was taken away. By the time he was released, all of his friends had been killed or were living in exile in another country, and he had no money.

Saint-Georges decided to go back to his father's plantation to see if he could claim and sell the land. When he arrived, he found a slave rebellion in progress across the entire island.

With nothing left there, Saint-Georges returned to Paris. Everything was different. The city had changed. No one knew him. The fame and respect he had for much of his life had disappeared. He lived a much quieter life now and died within a couple of years.

Two final thoughts...

Why don't we know more about Joseph de Bologne and his music?

We acknowledge there has been a centering of white experience in history, including music history. Information on non-white composers and performers is often difficult to find, let alone supported in multiple sources. That is the case with Joseph de Bologne or Le Chevalier de Saint-Georges.

Adding to that, the French Revolution cut-off the work of artists and destroyed a lot of the existing art. There was no way to preserve music in the late 1700s other than holding the written parts. Much of the music composed by Le Chevalier de Saint-Georges was lost during the French Revolution when so many buildings in Paris were burned.

Why is Saint-Georges sometimes called the "Other Mozart" or "Black Mozart"? Perhaps it should be the other way around.

There are conflicting accounts of how, or if, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart knew Saint-Georges. Saint-Georges was about 10 years older than Mozart.

A couple of sources report that Mozart lived as the guest of a nobleman for 6 months during the same time Saint-Georges lived there. It seems as though several ideas in Saint-Georges' music appeared in some of Mozart's music for the first time after he returned to Austria. It is rumored that Mozart was very jealous of Saint-Georges. It is also suggested that Monostatos, the evil character in Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, is modeled after Saint-Georges.

Another source tells of young Mozart attending a concert where Saint-Georges performed one of his violin concertos, but that the two never met.

I can relate the life and music of Le Chevalier de Saint-Georges to personal experience.

Complete these tasks and be prepared to discuss your thoughts and observations in small groups.

A. Copy one sentence from the reading that seems important. _____

B. Write one question you have about information in the reading. _____

C. Write one sentence about something you already know that connects to the reading.

I can analyze music notation.

Study the solo violin part for the first movement of Saint-Georges' Violin Concerto No. 2. **Begin to answer your choice of 4 out of 6 questions.** Then, listen to the performance and add to your answers. <https://youtu.be/TT5cbArFpiw> (20:49-30:22) *In case you get lost, notice there are time stamps in the written part that correspond to the video.*

1. Describe the use of dynamics and how they might create interest for the listener. Give at least one example and cite measure numbers in your explanation.

2. Use the orange, green, or blue boxes to prompt your thinking on repeated or recurring phrases. Give at least one example and cite measure numbers in your explanation.

3. Give an example of where the interval (distance) from one note to the next is larger than an octave.

4. Other markings in the score.

- Measure 37: What do the 2 slashes across the stem mean? _____

- Measure 144: What does *tutti* mean? _____

- Measure 163: What does the 8 and wavy line mean? _____

5. Why is the measure number sometimes not at the left end of the staff, but moved in to the first bar line?

6. If this is a piece you were going to learn, explain 3 strategies you would use to get started.

a.

b.

c.

Marcus Balter, "Composer, swordsman, polymath: Why Joseph Boulogne should never be called the 'Black Mozart,'" August 1, 2020, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/joseph-boulogne-black-mozart-film-racism-composer-a9640676.html>

Bill Barclay, "The Chevalier," <https://concerttheatreworks.com/portfolio/the-chevalier/>

Hugh Brewster and Eric Velasquez, *The Other Mozart* (2006)

Lesa Cline-Ransome and James E. Ransome, *Before There Was Mozart: The Story of Joseph Boulogne, Chevalier de Saint-George* (2011). James has received the NAACP Image Award and Coretta Scott King Award.

Jessica Duchon, "Chevalier de Saint-Georges: The man who got under Mozart's skin," February 7, 2016, <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/classical/features/chevalier-de-saint-georges-man-who-got-under-mozart-s-skin-a6859191.html>

Walter E. Smith, *The Black Mozart: Le Chevalier de Saint-Georges* (2004)

DEUX CONCERTO



A VIOLON PRINCIPAL

Premier et second Dessus Alto et Basse,
Hautbois, ou Flutes, et deux Cors, ad Libitum.

COMPOSÉ

PAR

M.^R DE S.^T GEORGES

ŒUVRE V.

Mis au Jour par M.^R BAILLEUX

Prix 7^{tt} 4^f.

A PARIS

*Chez M.^r Bailleux, M.^d de Musique, Ordinaire des Menus-plaisirs du Roy,
Rue St-Henre', à la Regle d'Or.*

*à Lyon, chez M.^r Castaud; à Toulouse, chez M.^r Brunet.
à Bordeaux, et à Lille, chez les Marchands de Musique.*

Gravé par M.^{me} Annereau.

L. 100 p. 85 m. 2

20:49

Violino Principale

CONCERTO

II

All.^o moderato

9

19

26

36

46

57

67

77

87

101

114

121

126

23:11 solo

Violino Principale

9

135

140

147

24:33

solo

157

163

171

tutti

178

25:29

solo

187

198

206

213

218

222

228

tutti

The image shows a page of a musical score for the Violino Principale, page 9. The score is written on ten staves. The first staff starts at measure 135. The second staff starts at measure 140. The third staff starts at measure 147, which is highlighted by a blue box. A red vertical line is placed at the beginning of measure 147, with the time 24:33 written next to it. Below the first staff, the word 'solo' is written. The fourth staff starts at measure 157. The fifth staff starts at measure 163. The sixth staff starts at measure 171, with the word 'tutti' written below it. The seventh staff starts at measure 178. A red vertical line is placed at the beginning of measure 178, with the time 25:29 written next to it. Below the seventh staff, the word 'solo' is written. The eighth staff starts at measure 187. The ninth staff starts at measure 198, which is highlighted by a yellow circle. The tenth staff starts at measure 206. The eleventh staff starts at measure 213. The twelfth staff starts at measure 218. The thirteenth staff starts at measure 222. The fourteenth staff starts at measure 228, with the word 'tutti' written below it.

10

[illegible]

II

Movement II

Largo

ement II

Violin II

101 102 103 104 105 106 107 108 109 110

Largo

p *f* *p* *f* *p* *f* *p* *f* *p* *f*

solo *tutti*